“He Bring My Life a Goodness.”

Asma and Taylor

“He Bring My Life a Goodness.”

[The following selections describe how Asma found a family of her own in the United States. Her husband and three children feature heavily in our conversations, so this collection is a bit longer than the others. But before we share those selections, it is important to define something for you first.]

T: Do you want to try and define these four words now, and then we can be done for the day?

A: Yes.

T: Okay. All right. So…The first word I have is “beautiful.” You use “beautiful” a lot. And so I want to hear, kind of—when you describe something “beautiful,” what do you mean?

A: [sighs] Everything I have a…Every time I have a...Um…Beautiful memory?

T: Mhm.

A: Beautiful memory, like a…the memory I never have a—the memory I don’t have a problem. Like um...Since you met me, I think it was, um, October?

T: Mhm.

A: Maybe October or maybe September—

T: I think it was October.

A: Yeah. Since you met me until now…um…hm. I never had the, I never had the troubled day, or, or bad day.

T: Really?

A: So, yeah, so between you met me ‘til today, I call I have a, beautiful days, or beautiful months, past.

T: Yeah.

A: So whenever my life is comfortable, normal life, like today, we drove somewhere, and we came somewhere [we had to move to find a quieter place before this conversation began].

T: Yeah.

A: That sometime happen, bad day, right?

T: Yeah.

A: It’s not a bad day, we, we already safe, we, we don’t have no trouble.

T: Right.

A: So, I never—since you met me until now, I have a beautiful life. I—moved. Since I have my baby, I have a gift, the most beautiful life, since I have my baby, she never get sick until yesterday, maybe—yeah, this week? She never get sick?

[fade]

A: Yeah, since I have my baby 'til now, I have a beautiful life. I moved my house, I have a house, I start a, a new life. I am, I am a new student. The first time a become a college student, um…I have a new neighbor, I never have a—I mean, I have a new neighbor, I have a new place better than before…um… I call "beautiful." Every time I have a comfortable life, I call it beautiful.

T: Feeling comfortable.

A: Yeah. Comfortable for me is beautiful. Without no trouble. Yeah, without no trouble.

[Those two words—"comfortable" and "beautiful"—are the most prominent in our conversations about Asma's husband and children, as well as the life they have had together.]

A: When I with my husband, I don't feel like he's only husband. I feel like he's a brother, he's a father, he's a son, he's a… I mean, he's more, he's more than a husband. Yeah, I feel a lot comfortable. I have been dating a lot of mens…

T: Yeah?

A: But, since I date him…I just…The first day, I felt comfortable.

[Asma met her husband in Ohio, when they were both working at the same company—he as a translator, and she in the packing room. She described their first meeting twice. They are both worth sharing.]

A: The part we got married—first time, first time he saw me, I was throwing one Arabic word.

T: Yeah.

A: For someone else.

T: Yeah.

A: And he saw me, he was like, "How do you speak Arabic?" I was like, "Yes, I speak Arabic." He say, "Where you come?" I say, "I went to Syria." He say, "Okay, I want to Egypt, too… Nice to meet you, my name is…" like that. That's the first time we met.

T: So he met you because he heard you speaking Arabic.

A: Yes.

T: And he was curious…Wow.

A: "That time," he say, "I found my person, [laughs]"

T: Yeah!

A: "Someone who come to Somalia speak born in there—born in Somalia, originally, and then lived a place… lived place… lived place… ah, Arabic country, who can speak English the way I speak… I think we can match." I say, "Maybe not, maybe so…" [laughter].

[Here, I think, is the more accurate rendition. The former, though, contained the phrase, "I think we can match," and I couldn't help but share that line. Perhaps the "true" version is a combination of the two.]

A: …Arabic, and my husband, he hear, like, when I, when he passed, when I was taking my stuff, and he say, "Are you speak Arabic?" I say, "Yes." I don't even wanna look at him because I was very tired! [laughs]

T: Yeah.

A: I want sleep, I say, "Yes," I didn't even look at him, he say, "Oh, Mashallah, I didn't know that." I say, "We will talk later, after." I just left it. [laughs]

T: Yeah.

A: Because I didn't want to stop anywhere to ask him something, I was very tired…

T: Yeah.

A: Um, next day, when I come back, he is out.

[He started coming by her desk at work.]

A: And then he [laughs] he stopped me here, and asking me some questions, and I say, he's coming to the office and wanted to ask me something, "What you wanna know? What, you want to fire me or something?" [laughs]

T: Yeah.

A: Because I didn't know him much, he's just a translator.

T: Yeah.

A: He, he's in the office, why does he… [trails off]

T: So you figured something was wrong, because he was here to talk to you.

A: Something was wrong, yes. And I was just, eh, don't wanna be, eh, asking me some question or something, I was trying to lock myself, I mean, "You speak Arabic, I speak Arabic, what's the point?" I mean… Normal.

T: Yeah.

A: And then…Suddenly, I don't know, he say, "I come from Egypt," and I say, "Okay. Then what are you do here?" He say, "I translate. Just the language."

T: Yeah.

A: "And sometime I help in the warehouse for the work, I mean normal."

T: Yeah.

A: "I help them wherever they send me."

T: Yeah.

A: And I'm like, "Okay." Um, second day, he come back and he say, "Where do you live?" and ah, and I told him normally, nothing is just interest, normal, and I told him, "Hmmm." Because he's older than me little bit—not little bit maybe… So, "Oh, your kids and wife are still in, in Egypt?" And he say, "No. I'm looking for a family now."

T: Yeah.

A: I say, "Is he crazy, he's looking here?" [laughs] When he say, "I'm look my family now…"

T: You thought he already had a family still.

A: Yeah. I told you, Somalian men on that age?

T: Yeah.

A: Never be without family.

T: Yeah.

[fade]

A: And he told me, "I'm trying to…find now."

T: Yeah.

A: And I say, "How lie, is he?"

T: Yeah?

[She thought he was lying at first. Moreover, her previous experiences with love had made honesty a priority for Asma. But he was telling the truth. And he was interested in her. And, little by little…]

A: And then, uh, finally, he keep coming, he keep coming, he keep coming. Sometime he told me, "I want your number." And we kinda like knowing each other little by little, and comfortable, he saw me, I'm not rushing, he's coming down… And um, I give him—

T: And you, and you liked him?

A: Uh, first I, I think he's…speaking [?] too much?

T: Yeah.

A: And then second I thought, "Maybe he's normal, he's wanna talk to you."

T: Yeah.

A: And then, um, he told me, "Give me your number." After that we talk more, more a lot.

T: Yeah. You were comfortable with him.

A: Yeah. After I talk, he talk. He told me all his—I mean all his past his life, and I told him, we kind of like similar, he was in somewhere else, Arabic country, a lot of years. And then we kind of like friend.

T: Mhm.

A: Talking each other. I know him six months, we didn't even date.

T: Yeah?

A: After that he started dating me. He asked me…

T: He asked you out?

A: To take me out, yeah.

[After dating for a few months, he took her on a day trip to Cleveland. When they were eating dinner before heading back, he proposed.]

A: And he take his pocket, and he put the ring in front of me, he say, "This is my decision for today. This was my last, final day to bring you here today, but you didn't know it."

T: Yeah?

A: "And I enjoy it. If you don't enjoy it, close the ring. If you enjoy it, take—accept the ring."

T: Yeah.

A: And I take it.

T: You took it?

A: I say, "I'm scared, but I also enjoy it." [laughs]

T: So you were afraid, but you were also happy with him.

A: Yeah, I'm afraid, being with someone I never travel—I mean, I never knew him before. I mean it's scary, a little bit.

T: Yeah.

A: But, trust him, he was making big decision today. I didn't know him.

T: Yeah.

A: He was, he say, "Picking you up today, it was the key, the only key left."

T: Yeah.

A: "I mean, whether I say, 'No, it's not right one." Whether I say, 'Yes, it's right one.'"

T: Yeah.

A: "And, more than fifty percent say yes."

T: Yeah.

A: "So…I didn't see anything to say no. So that's the reason I bring you today."

T: Yeah.

A: "To make decision."

T: Yeah.

A: "If I didn't make decision today, I will return you home."

T: Yeah.

A: "But this is my final." And yeah, and that day, it was like, scary, shaking, happy, confusing. [laughs] I-I was so happy.

T: It was an emotional day.

A: Yeah, it was. Happy the whole day.

T: But you were also scared.

A: I was also scared, but I said, "Oh, I'm so glad you take the decision quick, but…" He told me, "This is the ring it is nothing. You can keep it if you have more, more to know me?

T: Yeah.

A: "We can keep continue."

T: Yeah.

A: "But if you still afraid, and you want to be comfortable with me?"

T: Yeah.

A: "The ring is make us."

T: Yeah.

A: And I say, "Yes. I want to be comfortable with you, I don't want to hide it,.

T: Yeah.

A: "Wherever I walk, I don't want scared wherever I walk with you, I want to be done this thing."

T: Yeah.

A: And he was stand up and happy and hug me. [laughs]

T: Yeah?

A: Yeah, he hug me, he say, "We're done. I want to go see anyone you want to send me. You want to send me to your mom?"

T: Yeah.

A: “Call her? Or you want to let me introduce your uncle?” I say, “I’m comfortable to meet my uncle first.”

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

[Asma and her husband were both looking for families in the United States. So once they found each other, they didn’t feel so alone.]

A: But it’s very hard for the people who left their family and somewhere else and they’re alone here. Those people almost—they need a true life.

T: Mhm.

A: They need a family, they struggling a lot of things, they are very patient of the people who does have their family with them.

T: Mhm.

A: So…I feel more comfortable and happy.

[fade]

A: And between that, that year, it was the sweetest year ever. [laughs]

[fade]

A: Since I left my mom, it’s the first time, it’s the first time *ever* I felt like I was, I’m somewhere like my family.

T: Yeah. You found your family?

A: I mean, *someone* like family. Yeah. I mean, he cover me every way I’m looking for. Getting sick, holding me, telling me stories, um…Being happy, happy with me, he’s…Until now. I mean, I don’t know how you, how you understand the people personality, can you describe the personality? Now you know me you have some idea for me, right?

T: Yeah.

A: He never change. Never.

T: Yeah?

A: He have one personality? The way whether you are wife for him, whether you are sister with him, whether you are cousin, whether you are another person?

T: Yeah?

A: He just have his own personality.

T: And you like that?

A: Yeah, I like it.

T: He's being true to, to everyone.

A: Yeah. He like, I like the person who, who start in one place.

T: Yeah.

A: He's like that.

T: Yeah.

A: But sometime, I am, I feel like, "I'm smarter than you," because he doesn't like to move, he doesn't like to change, he's like, he's kind of like the people don't like to change.

T: He's steady.

A: Yeah. He does not like to change. He cannot see two face today or tomorrow, even if you fight, it's just…He get angry, but…Not change anything in him, personality.

T: Yeah. Yeah.

A: That's the thing I like about him.

T: Yeah. So you balance each other out?

A: Yeah. I'm-I'm the one who crazy. [laughs]

T: You, you're the one who's crazy, and moving around, and changing…

["Crazy" was another word I asked her to define for me. Particularly when she talks about her personality in opposition to her husband's.]

T: Do you really think you're—do you really think you're crazy?

A: Not crazy, I mean, um…It's not really really crazy when you describe the personality of the people, um…Sometime—I, I-I'm the one who like to try everything.

T: You like to try everything. Do you think that's crazy, though? Do you think that's a bad thing?

A: Maybe not crazy. I maybe call it crazy because I don't know any word to say, but…

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah. But that's not crazy that's—

T: Yeah.

A: My life is changing a lot.

T: Yeah.

A: Like if I’m move today tomorrow, I am happy. If I am normal tomorrow, another day, some friend call me, say, “Hey do you want to come for…?” And I say, “Yeah, I am!” I didn’t, I didn’t dance, I didn’t have fun a long time ago. I should go out.”

T: Yeah.

A: He’s not kinda like that.

T: Yeah. So you’re…you’re excited. You wanna go out and do things.

A: Yeah, I’m a…

T: Do you take risks?

A: I’m a person? I take risks a lot.

T: Yeah?

A: I love to take risks. He’s not.

T: Yeah.

A: He’s my opposite like that.

T: Yeah.

A: He never take risk. I push them sometime.

T: Yeah.

A: “Hey, do this, do this, is good for you.” I get tired when he’s not moving.

T: Yeah?

A: [laughs] I get tired when he’s not moving.

T: Yeah.

[fade]

T: Have you pushed him to take risks?

A: Yeah. He like it.

T: He does?

A: Yeah, he told me….

[One day, they had a conversation about those risks. He told her the following.]

A: “But…I’m kind of like, un-risk-takeable. Unrisk take person. Mmm. You always motivate me.” “What this mean?”

T: Oh, you—he motivates—you motivate him?

A: Yeah. He say, “The thing I like in you, you always motivate me. You-you almost like to take risk, but still you pushing me up, you support me always, you motivate me. And I-I appreciate that.” He always say that.

T: That’s beautiful.

A: Yeah, that’s beautiful. But [laughs], but he doesn’t like to move. I get crazy when he don’t! [claps hands together, laughs]

T: Yeah, and you don’t like to slow down, but he tells you to slow down.

A: Yeah. When he tell me to slow down, “You put me down, you don’t want to do me anything!”

T: Yeah?

A: And I cry, and he say, “No. You…The idea you have in your life, you think life is just a game? You can do whatever you want?”

T: Yeah.

A: “Just when you take the step, you have to think about before you take it.” And I’m not the people like that.

T: Yeah.

A: I just want something, I wake up in the morning and just do that thing.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

[pause]

T: So now you’re kind of learning to balance the two.

A: Now, now I kind of like learning, learning the balance, and being more responsible.

T: Yeah.

A: Before…Mmm…

T: But still willing to take those risks, I think.

A: Yeah.

T: I mean, you’re here [we met at her college campus that day], right?

A: Yeah, yeah, I’m here, I take a risk here.

T: Yeah!

[However, before we get to “here”—in this case, our conversation took place in an empty classroom at the college she now attends—there are some other major changes in Asma’s life that we need to share first.]

A: [chuckles] The month I marry, next year the month I get baby, yeah. And between—that year, that year, it was the sweetest year ever. [laughs] One year, it was the sweetest *ever* year we had.

T: Yeah?

A: Um…Yeah. That year-that year was special for me.

T Yeah?

A: And…

T: Yeah? What’s the most special thing you can remember? Is there like a moment that you loved the most? Like if you were thinking back on that year, is there like one…thing?

A: Is there…for that year?

T: Yeah.

A: Um, getting married is always exciting.

T: Yeah?

A: But after marrying, y-you don’t know what is happening. Um, are you comfortable with this person, are you not? I mean, some of the um, American people, like their culture is like, maybe they know the person before, so there’s nothing is change except the marriage day.

T: Right.

A: But our life is whole complete change, completely—

T: Right, because now you’re spending all this time together that you didn’t before.

A: Yeah. Even all your clothes you used to wear before? You have to take it out that day.

T: Yeah.

A: The second thing I forget…the…proposal, marriage, *everything,* who is gonna pay? The man is gonna pay, you’re not paying *anything.*

T: Yeah?

A: If you have money, you don’t have money, he’s accept you, whatever you put there.

T: Yeah.

A: But no one is gonna ask you, if the man tell you, “I’m ready,” he’s ready to spend all his money to you.

T: Yeah?

A: Yeah. That's, that's it. So I didn't spend anything.

T: Yeah?

A: All my bills is…

T: Were you still working though?

A: Yeah.

T: Yeah?

A: I keep continue working the same money.

[Asma continued working until she had her first son, Muhammad. Just over a year later, she had Muna. When Asma and I met for the first time, her newest daughter, Halima, was just a few months old. Becoming a mother, then, has been a major shift in Asma's life.]

A: But God find my life for me.

T: Yeah?

A: Not only me.

T: Yeah.

A: Just a gift I have ever get in my life. [sighs] He bring my life a goodness.

T: Yeah?

A: Exchange for the badness.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah. And…The, the-the greatest gift I have ever received, also, is, the time I become mom.

T: Yeah?

A: Being mom is…whole your life is changing!

T: Yeah?

A: You are absolutely different person. [pause]

T: A better person?

A: Different person.

T: Different person.

A: Better? …Completely different. You *left* the chapter half on your life. Everything you wanted to do? You will do your kids first.

T: Yeah?

A: You forgetting yourself.

T: Yeah.

A: How is that? You never forget yourself before having kids. But now you're forgetting yourself.

[fade]

A: And I just…I call my auntie, say, "If I knew much this responsibility? I will never gonna have the kids. But now I already have it. What am I supposed to do? I have to be a great mother."

T: Yeah.

A: And my auntie say, "Some people are looking for kids even after they did everything. And you're the, um, lucky person. You have your kids, being mom is not easy." I say, "I did not know that. If I know that, knowing, maybe I'm not gonna have kids."

T: Yeah?

A: It's not easy.

T: Yeah.

A: It's not easy. You can…especially first kid. Is not easy.

T: Yeah.

[fade]

A: And being patient, you need to process. Like…After the baby one year, you're gonna have another baby. Now you don't care about in the middle of night, you driv—

T: You get used to it.

A: You get used to it. Now I don't care. Anytime they wake me up, I'm a happy mother to serve them.

T: Yeah.

A: But…having [Muhammad]? The most hard time I have ever.

T: Yeah? Were you…Were you—would you—would you do it again? If given the chance? To start over. Would you have a family again?

A: After I know everything? No, I wanna be alone. [laughs]

T: Really? [laughs]

A: I wanna be alone.

T: Really?

A: I wanna be alone, I totally change it. I wanna be alone. I forget myself. Even, forget my personality.

T: Yeah?

A: I forget the things I love it. I forget…Eh, whole my life is completely different.

T: Yeah?

A: Totally different.

T: Yeah?

A: I cannot talk to my friends for longer, I have, "Mommy! Mommy! Mommy! Mommy!"

T: Yeah?

A: [sighs] I mean…going out with your friends? You're looking at the time.

T: Yeah?

A: Looking at the time when you're going back home. Because you left the kids. [pause] Something is lock in your legs.

T: Yeah?

A: Even if you walk outside, it is—they are just [laughs as she speaks] behind you. And it's not easy.

T: Yeah?

A: It's-it's not easy. But. If, if I was in the, eh, in my country?

T: Mhm.

A: At this time? I would never have the kids before graduating from college.

T: Yeah.

A: I will graduate the college, I will done everything I wanna done, and then get kids.

T: And then have kids

A: Yeah. But then my situation, now, my dream is still…in the middle of somewhere, and I-having kids…Um, I didn't have no option because…[sighs] It was—I wanted family, I wanted education. If I be alone, it's very hard to get education.

T: Right.

A: If I have, get married, I will have kids.

T: Right.

A: Two come to me one time.

T: Yeah…Came together.

A: Came together.

T: And the family came first. Then the education.

A: Family came first.

T: Yeah….So you wouldn't-wouldn't do it again?

A: If I'm single now? I know how hard it is raise the kids? I wanted kids! But [laughs] I want someone work with me, work for me!

[There is a clear contradiction here—Asma's relationship with motherhood is a complex one, and it was something we discussed in depth one afternoon.]

T: Because… So speaking about, speaking about being a mum, being a good mum to your kids, we've talked quite a few times about you being a mom, and there are times when you've said that it's the greatest gift you've ever been given…

A: Yes.

T: Um. But then, I asked you last time we talked, if, if you could go back and do it again, would you have kids, and you said no. [A laughs] So I'm curious, like…

A: How?

T: Yeah, like do you, do those—both ideas sort of exist together? Like, what do you mean?

A: I'm gonna, I'm gonna explain you.

T: Yeah!

A: Having kids… Hundred percent is, for me—I don't know maybe the other people—for me, is the thing I used to wish.

T: You used to wish for?

A: Yeah. I used to wish….both parents. If my husb—if the man I want to marry him, he's not like the same, on my page?

T: Mhm.

A: I will never marry that man.

T: Yeah.

A: Because… What I see a lot of kids are suffering without parents. When I see a lot of kids, a lot of parents are getting divorced for no reason. I mean, they had important things, you are very responsible person when you bring another person to life in this world. You're the one who behind, I mean, if you don't want kids, stay away for not needing kids.

T: Yeah.

A: But after you have a kids, no matter what you think your life, you are a responsible person, you must show the kids how hard, you're gonna raise them. I used to wish not to get married a man who does not take care—I mean, who does not taking the responsibility seriously. I say, "If I want to marry any man, I will never marry having kids, because it's very hard to raise the kids my own self."

T: Mhm.

A: Because I was seeing my mom, how hard she was raising us. But my father, God took him, he never left us, for no reason, God take him from us, he was there for us, so…. I wait, I wait, I wait until twenty-four years old for myself, no mommy telling me, "Wait," no daddy telling me, "Wait," I was not in college, so saying, "Okay, I wanna finish my college and get married like that." No, I just want to be mature.

T: Yeah.

A: If I can't be responsible, or no. But after I get married, I see the kids how hard I [??]. I was imagining how hard, know it's hard, but *seriously* seriously, they share your healthy.

T: Yeah?

A: They share your healthy. I get C-Section three times.

T: [whispers] C-Section three times. [Muna], I was supposed to die, [Muna].

[fade]

A: I, I close to lost my life. And then later, having [Halima]…

T: Yeah.

A: If I don't want kids, I will never have [Halima], because I already have [Muna] and [Muhammad], hard time.

T: Yeah.

A: I wanted kids. I love kids. I was happy to take each one of—very serious responsibility. But, when they share my healthy, when they share everything, when I suffer myself without no grandma, no grandpa with me… I feel like, "Is this the life I wanted?" [quiet laugh, if a laugh can be both quiet and hysterical and contained in a moment] I will never—if I knew it-it, I would never gonna have it.

T: Yeah?

A: That—that's the thing I was meaning. Like, if I knew this thing, happening? I would never know it, but I already have it.

T: If you were alone. But you always wanted this anyway.

A: Yes. I was always hundred percent sure. I wanted, I wanted kids. And then my kids, now, every time I see them playing in front of me, I say, "What an amazing life you have it."

T: Yeah.

A: "And the healthy kids, is the perfect gift God gave to you."

T: Yeah.

A: Healthy kids is not easy to have the healthy kids. Is not easy. It's not easy. But…nobody can give you that thing unless the God give you.

T: Yeah. So, I guess you tend to say, God gave you these children, or God took your father away, um, God gave you the gift of coming here, God gave you your husband. Um—and you don't have to answer this if you don't want to, if this is a silly question—

A: It's okay. [chuckles]

T: Um…How much of it is God giving you something, and how much is…you finding it yourself?

A: Um… [pause] Idea. I mean, uh, I know if, if I try, to do all the good things? And, I don't have a faithful? Um… I think I may not succeed.

T: So it's the two together? It's not, it's not the two…

A: Two together. It's not only me,

A/T: It's not only God.

A: If I sit here today, and I say, "You wanna go home?" "No, until God take me to the home, until God gonna take me to the home." Is God gonna take me home? No!

T: No, you're gonna get home.

A: I have to do, I have to bring everything I wanted the good way.

T: Yeah?

A: Then He is helper, always. Yeah, He's a helper always. Maybe my father died, I know for some reason, my country becoming crazy, become crazy, but…. Maybe, maybe it's a lesson. Lesson for me, lesson for my sister, lesson for my mom…. Maybe he left us for, left all of us to be a lesson. [pause] But we—we are very sad, but…but that's what it is. We cannot save him, if God wanted to take him, or we can, we can, we can let him die, we hate him, and lets the God take him, right? So everything is together. My mind is always to bring good things.

[So Asma has taken the life she has been given and made the most of it. Despite her initial misgivings about the difficulties of motherhood, Asma quickly took initiative and is a committed, creative caretaker. She has felt a particular concern with balancing both the Somalian and United States cultures when raising her children.]

T: Do you think it's important to—that they learn Somalian? Do you think that's like—

A: Yes.

T: Yeah?

A: Yes. I do. That's my job, and they live here, they're in America, they live here to learn to whatever kids here to learn, but as original I'm from Somalia, it's my job, my kids, to learn Somalia…

T: Yeah.

A: Arabic…

T: Yeah.

A: And they-they have to take practical religion.

T: Mmm. [nods]

A: I mean, now they're too young, but, step by step, when they're finishing high school, I will…I wanna they know part of my culture.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Not everything perfect, I know they have busy life.

T: Yeah.

A: But I am trying to… My kids have…Already know different cultures where their parents have come from.

T: Right.

A: But they have… many choice, they can practice any religion they want when they grow up.

T: Yeah [writing].

A: But my job is to let them—what my parents teach me, I'm gonna let them…teach them.

T: Right.

A: So they have a choice when they grow up.

[However, without the guidance of her mothers and aunts back in Somalia, Asma has had to teach herself many of the main skills of motherhood. One of her biggest resources? YouTube.]

A: So I tried to watch the "Super Nanny," I try to, try to talk the way she give, she give advice for the parents. And then, and then that was for managing at home, without no teacher. And then after that, I uh, I start to watch it, same thing as that, watching how to, how to teach, eh, how to teach two-years old, how to teach one-years old. Like letters, ABC, activity [??].

T: Mhm.

A: Um, sometime I buy some easy painting…

T: Yeah.

A: … At the stores, and, and put them something. But I don't know how to do because my, my country, we never played the paint, or something like that, so I tried to learn from video how to kids paint, how to kids, blocks… I never play blocks back home, we don't have blocks back home.

T: Yeah.

A: We can have free toys everywhere, but not blocks.

T: Yeah.

A: How, how to play the blocks—simple life, I watch everything here, no one teach me here, I didn't go to school for that.

T: So you, so you didn't talk to anybody here? You just did it online?

A: I just learn everything online. Even how to change the diaper, I learn it online [laughs].

T: Really?

A: Even how to change a diaper, I watch it on YouTube! I swear to God, the YouTube teach me a lot of things.

T: Yeah?

A: Yeah.

[fade]

A: I used to come to the library, but I didn't know the library had the place to, to teach the kids. Like, this circle? [pointing to another part of the library where we were talking]

T: Mhm.

A: When I was, my son there…I didn't know that. I used to come the library, and…When I was the hospital, appointment for my son, they used to give him small books, gift…

T: Yeah?

A: When you go to hospital, they give you a small gift every time you go there. Um, I bring the book with me and I try to read to read him [Muhammad] when he was three months, four months old, and he kind of like looking like that, and listen to me, interested, and I say, "That's a good idea!" I come to the library, I take some books and go to read my books to my kids, and bring them back after few weeks. And then, this one lady told me, "Hey, you can bring them," uh, and she give me a schedule for the time for the kids?

T: Yeah.

A: And she say, "You can bring them all these days, whenever day you want to.

T: Yeah.

A: "Teach them how to, to hold something…" Like some activities.

T: Yeah.

A: I used to bring them until I get [Muna]. [Muna], when she was a year, I start to bring them, I start to bring them, I start to bring them to the library… [trails off]

T: So you did all this yourself?

A: *All* this myself. Every time I have a time, I bring the kids to library and they help me how to play the balls…

T: That's amazing.

A: Yeah. And then, after I learn everything, I start to [patting couch] do same thing on my home.

T: Yeah?

A: My kids.

T: Wow.

A: Yeah. It's so beautiful. I mean, you have to have skills, I mean…

T: Yeah.

A: When you're becoming mom, you can't just *be* mom…

T: And you learned all on your own?

A: Yeah. Yeah. I'm very, very helpful. Even my husband give me credit for that.

T: Yeah? That's amazing.

A: Yeah. He say, "You, you're caring about your kids a lot, a lot." Yeah.

T: That's cool. That's really cool. [softly, warmly]

A: Yeah. I love it here [laughs softly]. He get jealous sometimes. [laughs loudly].

T: Really? He gets jealous?

A: He say, "You care a lot, more the kids than me!" He say, "You care a lot, your kids, more than me!"

[Joking aside, Asma's husband is an affectionate father and husband.]

A: And he play with them, he like to show them new things. So that's my break. I-I told him before, when I was have, ah, only [Muhammad], I say, "When you're here, I feel like I'm in break."

T: Yeah?

A: Yeah. And like, he like…Sometime, when we wake up in the morning? It's not easy Somali man do that.

T: Yeah?

A: Because we don't know…this culture. We know only, we know only our culture.

T: Mhm.

A: Those who grow up there. When we wake up in the morning, Saturday or Sunday, he like to give me one day. One day for me.

T: Yeah? Yeah?

A: He—When, when he hear the kids are wake up, [Muhammad and Muna, spoken almost as a single word] making noisy, he walk and grab the baby and close the door, and…[quiet little laugh]

T: He gives you your day.

A: Yeah. Gives the kids breakfast. Changing the little one, give her milk. He, he find his breakfast even, anything is there. He just leave me alone. [loving laugh]

T: That's lovely.

A: Yeah. That's very lovely. Yeah…

[In addition, Asma has thought about having more children.]

T: Do you want more than three?

[pause]

A: Last week, I start to thinking about it.

T: Mhm.

A: First when I have [Halima], I say, "No more." Last week, last week, I started thinking about it. [sighs] I need a boy.

T: You need another boy?

A: I need, I need [Muhammad's] brother. One more. [Muhammad's] brother. But who knows? It's gonna be girl, it's gonna be boy, who knows?

T: Mhm. So you're feelin' like *maybe* one more?

A: Yeah. Maybe one more, but I don't know what it will be. And then I say, "Mmm. Not right now. Just raise these two—three—right now."

T: Yeah.

A: "And then relax, finish your college." Then maybe six years after, eight years, maybe."

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah. That's my plan.

[It is easy to get lost in Asma's busy days as a wife, mother, and new student. However, taking the time to remember what is "beautiful" adds another level of gratitude to Asma's narrative, reminding both of us of the depth of her experience, as well as the deeper hopes and worries that permeate her daily life.]

A: I call beautiful life because I see around me how God eh, give me a beautiful. For me, it's beautiful.

T: Yeah.

A: Because I've been through, for my country, fighting, moving to city to city, people dying in front of us, Daddy we are waiting for, die, and our neighbor's mother they are waiting for, die, so go back in my country, I feel it's horrible.

T: Yeah.

A: But here, I have a beautiful, a lot of things beautiful.

T: Yeah.

A: The calling beautiful the things is…Maybe you see normal? But I don't see normal. Because I, I see something exciting.

T: Yeah.

A: Fu—My future is very exciting.

T: Yeah.

A: And my life is exciting, too. I, I very happy and love this.

T: So do you think it's more beautiful because…because when you started out, you were living in so many hard times and things were very much not beautiful, so you—?

A: Yes, yes, the reason I call everything beautiful maybe behind the way I grew up?

T: Yeah.

A: And now.

T: So what you're saying is that the most normal things that I see are beautiful to you because you understand how beautiful they are.

A: Yeah.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah. Because how blessing I am.

T: Yeah.

A: Husband who leaving me and come back to me. I worry about my husband sometime, because in this [winter] weather, he drive, he driving sometimes, I worry about—does he, does he will come back home safely? Or maybe it will happen, what happened to Dad. You will back to his dying, his, his body. Even in the bed, sometime, I open my eyes, I look my fa—I look my husband and say, "Is this body…Will…Will continue for many years with you? Or maybe one day he leave you?" And most thing I worry about these days is, does, does my husband will continue raising with me these kids, or maybe he will leave you the way he—my daddy leave me.

T: You're worried he's gonna die?

A: Yeah. [breathy] I mean… [tearing up. Sighs.]

T: Deep breath. It's okay, it's okay. It's okay. If you don't want to talk about it, we don't have to.

[long pause]

A: Yeah. When I go back, look my mom, how she's hard with us, I always pray, I say [sighs], "Don't let me suffer these kids with my…" [cannot speak for the tears]

T: [whispers, barely audible] It's okay.

[pause]

A: I have a life different from my mom now. [pause] Because we're two parents, now. And in early months there's me, alone. [pause] I'm sorry.

T: No, no.

A: [voice is thick and deep] The most life I have is beautiful.

T: Yeah.

A: Since I get married to now. It's very beautiful. Dad coming back every day, home. Mom being mom, like the way it should be. [inhales, clears throat] If anything happens my husband our life is complete changed.

T: Yeah.

A: The way my, my mom's life change.

T: Yeah.

[long pause]

A: Yeah. The two things I worry about is... My mom coming to this country, and, and my husband. He safe and raise with me [one-breath laugh] with, with these kids.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah… I-I think I never teared [crying-laughing, I reach over and comfort her].

T: It's okay, it's okay. You're okay. It's—it's been a big day! [laughs]

A: Yeah. Today I get tears because…I always worry about the beautif—the beautiful life I have it now?

T: Mhm.

A: One day, to turn off and change at a different day.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I will wish to continue this life [inhales] until I die.

T: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

T: You're scared the beauty can just disappear.

A: Yes.

T: Because you know how quickly it can.

A: Yes. I know how quickly it can. Because I born in, I born [date]. My country was very beautiful, much better than what they suffering today. And when I was my age like [Muhammad], everything was change. Everything is change. [pause] My uncles died. My father died. [sighs] My neighbors died, never come back. We're running city to city. Yeah. [pause] I don't call a life that.

T: Yeah.

A: Until now, some people are suffering the same.

T: Yeah.

A: That's why I call myself a lucky girl. I'm a lucky girl. [pause] I also wishing to my, the most thing I am wishing to have today is my mom.

T: Yeah.

A: I just want her relax. She, she suffer a lot.

T: Yeah.

A: I'm the only one who, who understand how much relaxing does she need it.

T: Yeah.

[pause]

A: Yeah. I will serve her until, until she die.

T: Yeah.

A: I will tell her beautiful words, she never even hear before. I know how much the parents is raising kids for hardly.

T: Yeah. [barely audible]

A: After I get my kids… I know how much, how much kids are…Make you tired, sharing your life, your health, everything… Every second you live, they sharing with you every minute, they're calling you, "Mommy, Mommy!" How about if you come into work and tired? I mean, you just hear a lot of voices, cooking them, feeding them, cleaning them…I'm only now mom, full-time mom, how about if I go to work, what will be?